



state senator
Johnny Nugent
2005 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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state senator
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VICTORY!

Late Session Win for Riverboat Communities

Legislature Creates Agriculture Dept.

Sen. Nugent Co-Authors Landmark Legislation

Agriculture is one of the largest and most important industries in Indiana. As one of the nation's leaders in a vast array of agricultural areas, it would probably come as a surprise to most Hoosiers that, prior to this legislative session, our state had no official Department of Agriculture.

Indiana was one of only four states that operated without an official Department of Agriculture. The other three – Alaska, Arkansas, and Rhode Island – come as little surprise, but our state ranks second in the nation in the amount of prime farmland, and a one-stop entity that would handle all of our agriculture issues would greatly benefit this industry.

House Enrolled Act 1008, which I co-sponsored, created

the official Indiana State Department of Agriculture and consolidates duties that were once scattered across numerous agencies.

DID YOU KNOW?

indiana is one of the nation's top agriculture states, ranking #1 in ducks; #2 in popcorn, ice cream and tomatoes; #4 in soybeans; #5 in corn and hogs, and the list goes on.

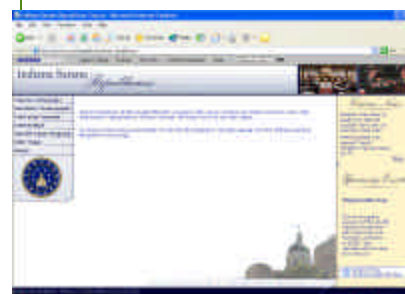
The move costs Indiana taxpayers no additional money. In fact, I hope it actually saves money by merging the 10 separate agriculture boards and commissions into one large department.

The bill also changes who

serves as the chief advocate for the agriculture community. Previously, the lieutenant governor automatically served as the state's top agriculture official. While most lieutenant governors, including current Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman, have performed admirably in that position, some have not had the expertise needed to carry out such important responsibilities. The passage of this bill allows the governor to appoint a Commissioner of Agriculture, which will allow the governor to choose the most qualified person to handle the state's agricultural dealings.

Indiana is one of the nation's top agriculture states. This new law will enable us to take full economic advantage of one of our state's traditional strengths.

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As you may have heard or read, there was discussion of using money from riverboat communities to help fund this year's budget. I loudly protested this issue the entire session, and I am elated at the outcome of this situation.

The state is not supposed to take this money away from our riverboat communities, however many lawmakers wanted to do just that. I objected to this vehemently and pointed out that this would forever damage the state's credibility. I am glad that state government lived up to its word.

I want to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to both the House and Senate conferees who took my protests to heart and took this proposal off the table. This means a

better and brighter tomorrow for the citizens of our riverboat communities.

I also thank the citizens and elected officials of the Ohio riverboat counties and communities. I commend your willingness to stand up and fight for what is right, which helped earn this triumph.

And last but not least, I could not have been successful without the earnest support of Governor Mitch Daniels. Since taking office, Governor Daniels has exhibited the leadership and vision needed to put Indiana on the right track. He recognized the state's fiscal needs but understood the value of a promise. The state promised riverboat communities this money and thanks to him, they will continue to receive it.



Sen. Nugent pleads his case on the riverboat issue before the full Senate.

Despite the fact that this might not be the last time we have to fight this battle, we were very successful this time around and won a great victory for our community.

"In the end, the state chose to take the high road--and not take this money away from riverboat communities."



↑ Senator Nugent discusses the riverboat issue with Sen. Vi Simpson (D-Bloomington).



↑ Nugent chats with Sen. Allen Paul (R-Richmond) about the budget and the riverboat money.



↑ Nugent explains his position to Sen. Murray Clark (R-Indianapolis).



↑ Visiting with constituents on the Senate floor.



← Nugent presented a passionate debate on the Senate floor concerning the riverboats and the plan to take money from those communities. Here, he answers questions from Sen. Luke Kenley (R-Noblesville).

RIVERBOAT BATTLE WON BY TEAM EFFORT

Nugent Worked Hard; Wants to Acknowledge Many Others Who Helped the Success

I again want to thank all of those who helped in this great success for our riverboat communities.

Together, we made sure that the state left riverboat money to the riverboat communities--where it belongs. Without question, this was a total team effort. I enjoyed the support of other riverboat legislators,

lobbyists, local city, town, and county officials, and hundreds of local citizens.

We also owe a genuine thank you to Governor Mitch Daniels.

WE did this together for OUR community.



Much Accomplished in

It may seem that daylight-saving time, the expansion of the Indianapolis convention center and new stadium, and the riverboat issue dominated the 2005 legislative session, but the General Assembly passed many initiatives that will be beneficial to citizens across Indiana. We addressed issues such as election reform, National Guard benefits, child protection laws, and improving health care services. The following are just a few examples of this year's accomplishments:

Elections — We worked hard this session to give voters confidence that our elections will be fair, open and honest. A bill passed that tightens restrictions on obtaining an absentee ballot. The bill does not make registering to vote more difficult; it simply creates new safeguards to protect the rights of honest absentee voters. We also passed legislation that will require voters to show a picture ID issued by the state or federal government (such as a driver's license or state ID card). Without proof of identification, it is easy for fraudulent voters to use different names at different times on Election Day. Considering recent nationwide voting problems, and some within Indiana, this is a common-sense step to help prevent fraud.



Child Protection — The General Assembly also passed legislation aimed at protecting Hoosier children. Two bills in particular will enhance the effectiveness of our sex offender and violent offender registry. The bills add the possession of child pornography to the 14 existing offenses and also allow neighborhood associations to receive the semi-annual updates of

the list. We also created the Department of Child Services to handle child support, child protection, adoption and foster services. Our children are our most precious commodity, and should receive special attention from the state.

National Guard Benefits — Our National Guard members are serving overseas in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and several other countries. Because of the huge sacrifice these men and women are making on our behalf, we passed a measure that exempts spouses and children of Guard members killed in the line of duty from paying tuition at any state educational institution. This bill was authored to help support those dependents and spouses who endure financial difficulties after losing a loved one in active duty.

Health Care — We passed a bill that creates a panel of experts to develop a medical information system for Indiana. A medical information system would connect physicians' offices, pharmacies, laboratories, imaging centers, hospitals and other medical facilities. If a person became ill in another part of the state, a physician with proper authorization could have immediate access to the person's medications, medical history and lab and X-ray reports. That patient then would receive better, more personalized care. The panel must create a plan that will maintain privacy.

This year's session has been an eventful one, full of activity. Although the session's end has come, my job as your senator is never finished and I am available year-round to assist you.



↑ Nugent argues his case to Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman, Sen. Bob Meeks (R-LaGrange).



↑ Nugent discusses the issue with Senate Tax and Fiscal Policy Chairman, Sen. Luke Kenley (R-Noblesville).



↑ Discussing the riverboat issue with Sen. Brent Steele (R-Bedford).



↑ Sen. Nugent testifying before the Senate Tax and Fiscal Policy Committee on the riverboat issue.